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ABSTRACT

A study circle is a group of diverse members of a community who meet with a facilitator to find common ground for solutions and actions. The Study Circles Resource Center proposes a program of Community-Wide Study Circles to talk about student success and develop ideas for action in the community and schools. This brochure provides a rational for study circles and offers appropriate discussion materials. The program described involves four meeting sessions with the following discussion topics: (1) What does a good education mean to each of us? (2) Why are some of our students not succeeding? (3) Picturing a community where all students can do their best; and (4) What specific actions do we want to take? The brochure provides a section with starting points for discussion, sample viewpoints, and facilitator tips for each of the four sessions. The final section of the brochure compiles additional tips for participants and facilitators, a description and typical agenda of the action forum that follows a round of study circles, and a bibliography of resources for further discussion and action. (KK)

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Helping *Every* Student Succeed

Schools and Communities Working Together

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A guide for public dialogue and problem solving

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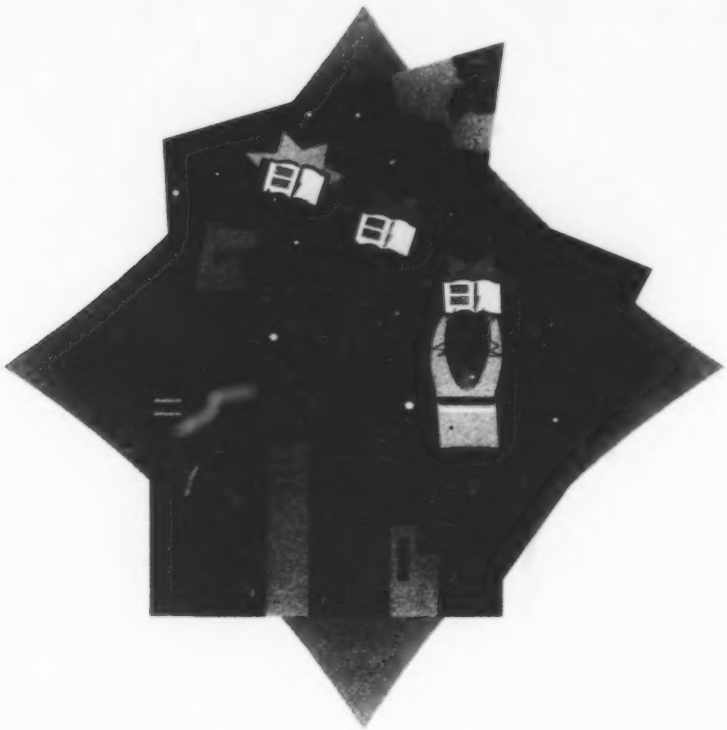

Schools and Communities Working Together

Study Circles Resource Center

A project of the Topsfield Foundation, Inc.

STUDY CIRCLES
RESOURCE CENTER

Face-to-face Dialogue and the Study Circles Resource Center

Face-to-face discussion has always been an essential principle of American democracy. In 1989, the Topsfield Foundation, Inc., a private, nonprofit, nonpartisan foundation, created the Study Circles Resource Center (SCRC) to help all kinds of people engage in dialogue and problem solving on critical social and political issues. Since then, SCRC has worked with hundreds of communities, on many different issues.

SCRC draws its name from the "home study circles" of the late nineteenth century, sponsored by the Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle in New York. Those circles provided adult education through small-group discussion. SCRC has taken the idea of small-group, face-to-face discussion, and adapted it to provide a means of structuring diverse, large-scale participation in democratic dialogue. These circles offer participants the opportunity not only to discuss critical social and political issues, but also to take action and create change on those issues. Central to SCRC's approach is the belief that everyone should have a voice in our democracy and in solving public problems. We support communities in discovering the value of inclusive democratic dialogue, and in developing the skills to be able to make this kind of exchange an ongoing part of community life.

To fulfill its mission, SCRC has developed a process known as "community-wide study circles," which helps bring large numbers of people together for creative community change. In a community-wide study circle program, many small-group study circles take place at the same time. Large numbers of people from all parts of the community meet in diverse groups to talk about a particular issue. These study circle programs lead to a wide range of action efforts.

SCRC can help you organize study circles throughout your community. Our staff members and associates offer their services to community leaders at every stage of creating a study circle program:

- publishing discussion guides on a wide range of issues;
- providing advice on organizing and facilitating study circles;
- working to develop strong, diverse coalitions within communities;
- teaching how to develop or customize discussion guides;
- explaining how to set program goals and assess progress;
- helping communities connect dialogue to action and change.

For more information please contact us: SCRC, P.O. Box 203, Pomfret, CT 06258.
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Introduction

What Is a Community-wide Study Circle Program?

It...

- is organized by a diverse group of people from the whole community.
- includes a large number of people from all walks of life.
- has easy-to-use, fair-minded discussion materials.
- uses trained facilitators who reflect the community's diversity.
- moves a community to action when the study circles conclude.

All across the U.S.A., people are concerned about how our children are doing in school. We all want the best for our children.

We know, however, that many of our students are not doing well. This study circle program will help us work together so that our children will succeed in school.

To reach this goal, all of us must be involved: parents, students, and adults from all walks of life. If we listen to each other and work together, we will have a better chance of finding solutions that help young people do their best in school.

Why Talk about Student Success?

When we look at the graduation rates and test scores, we see who is succeeding and who is not. But understanding why some students succeed more than others is far more difficult. We all have different ideas and views about why some students do not do as well.

Here is what some people think are the roots of the problem:

- There is not enough money.
- Some parents are more involved than others.
- Teachers have limited training.
- Some students don't work hard.
- Schools are not prepared for the larger social problems that are now coming into our schools.

Here is what some people see as the solutions to the problem. They say we need...

- more testing.
- smaller classes.
- a more diverse staff.
- schools, parents, and students working together for student success.

We may disagree about these causes and solutions. Most of us agree, however, that when we fail to educate all our students, our whole community is affected. When schools and students are successful, the whole community does well. Finding solutions to these complex problems will not be easy. It will take many different efforts, and many different groups working together.

Why Use Study Circles to Talk about Student Success?

Your community may already have programs in place to help students succeed. If that is the case, then study circles can help in two ways.

- By helping more parents, students, and others become aware of existing programs, they can open up those programs to more students.
- They can bring new energy and ideas into current programs. They can also expand and improve these programs and identify needs that have not been met.

If your community does not already have student success programs in place, then study circles can be a good way to begin new programs.

How will this study circle program help?

It will...

- build trust and connections between a variety of people.
- deepen our understanding of why students do, or do not succeed in school.
- help people respect each other and listen to different ideas.
- help people find common ground for solutions and actions.

How will this study circle program work?

- Many circles will meet at the same time.
- Each group will be made up of eight to twelve people from different backgrounds.
- Groups will meet together for four, two-hour sessions.
- Each group will move forward with the help of two facilitators and this discussion guide.

Why Might a Study Circle Program Work for Our Community?

- People care about their communities. They want to make things better.
- Complex problems call for many kinds of solutions.
- People from all backgrounds and all parts of society have something to offer.
- When everybody is included in public life, everybody benefits.
- When people talk with each other face-to-face, they get to know each other and trust each other. New ideas and plans are born.
- When people consider different points of view on a complex issue, they find common ground and better solutions.
- When people know their voice counts, they are more likely to take part in creating and carrying out ideas for community change.
- The more people who are involved, the bigger the impact.
- Community change is stronger and deeper when people work together.

Where Will This Lead?

In the last session of each study circle, people will develop ideas for action. In most programs, these ideas are presented at a large community "action forum." This takes place after all the circles finish. Those people who want to stay involved will work together to put these ideas into action.

What Is a Study Circle?

It...

- is a small, diverse group of eight to twelve people.
- meets together for four, two-hour sessions.
- sets its own ground rules. This helps people respect each other and get results.
- considers the issue from many points of view.
- helps people see where they agree and have common ground.
- is led by a facilitator who won't take sides, and who helps manage the discussion. He or she is not there to teach the group about the issue.
- starts with personal stories, then helps the group look at a problem from many points of view. Next, the group talks about how they want things to be. Finally, they make plans for action and change.

The Role of the Facilitator

In a study circle,

the facilitator...

- helps the discussion move forward.
- helps the group set its own ground rules.
- does not have to be an expert on the issue.
- helps the group look at the issue from many points of view.
- helps the group talk respectfully and productively.
- does not join the conversation or offer an opinion.

Steps in the Dialogue

In a study circle, each session builds on the one before it. Here is how the sessions fit together:

Session 1

MEET EACH OTHER

- Get to know and understand one another.
- Talk about what a good education means to us.
- Be given information about how our students are doing.

Session 2

EXPLORE THE PROBLEM

- Discuss how our students are doing.
- Talk about why we believe some students do not succeed in school.

Session 3

SET GOALS

- Create a "picture" of a community where all our students can do their best.

Session 4

PLAN FOR ACTION

- Talk about how to make our visions from Session 3 happen. Some of these ideas will be actions that people can do alone, or in groups. Others will be things that schools or the community can do.

The Action Forum

After the four sessions are over, we will have a large meeting where we will collect action ideas from all of the study circles. At this action forum, there will be a chance for people to sign up to do some of these things. See page 37 for more information on the action forum.

What Does a Good Education Mean to Each of Us?

Facilitator Tips

- This session has five parts. Use the amount of time suggested for each as a guide.
- Help everyone feel welcome. Be sure each person has a chance to speak and to hear the other group members.
- Have someone list major themes from this session on large sheets of paper so everyone can see them. (See ideas on how to take notes in the "Tips for Facilitators" on page 36.)
- Save the notes so that you can refer to them in later sessions.
- Label a large sheet of paper "Action Ideas." If group members come up with action ideas for helping every student succeed, list them here. (You will use these notes in Session 4.)
- Label another large sheet of paper "Things We Are Already Doing." If group members bring up things that are already being done to help every student succeed, list them here. (You will use these notes in Part 4 of Session 3. You may use them again when you are working on action ideas in Session 4.)

Introduction to the Session

By coming to this study circle, we show that we care about our schools and our students. Each of us has much to offer. We all want to help every student succeed in our schools.

The goal of today's session is to get to know each other, and to share some of our hopes and concerns. This will help the rest of our sessions go better. Today, we will also talk about what an education means to each of us. What do we want our graduates to be able to do? This will help us find action steps in the last session.

Part 1: Welcome and Introductions

(10 minutes)

- The facilitator will introduce him/herself, and explain his/her role. (See "The Role of the Facilitator" on page 4.)
- The facilitator will explain a little bit about our study circle program.
- Together with the facilitator, we will look through the "Steps in the Dialogue" on page 4.
- Next, we will look over the "Introduction to the Session" on this page.
- Finally, we will go around the circle and say our names.

Part 2: Setting the Ground Rules

(10 minutes)

We need to agree on the rules about how to talk with and listen to each other. They will help our study circle work better. Here are some ideas.

- Listen to and treat each other with respect.
- Each person gets a chance to talk.
- One person talks at a time. Don't cut people off.
- Speak for yourself. Don't try to speak for "your group."
- If you feel hurt by what someone says, say so, and say why.
- It's OK to disagree.
- Help the facilitator keep things on track.
- Some of the things we will say in the study circle will be private (personal). We will not tell these stories to other people, unless we all say it is OK.

Part 3: How Have Our Lives Shaped Our Ideas of a Good Education?

(60 minutes)

Our own life stories often shape our ideas and beliefs. We will use this session to share parts of our life stories. This will help the rest of our sessions go better. Be as open and honest as possible with each other.

Starting Points:

1. Think back. What was school like for you? What did you like and dislike? (For students, talk about what school is like for you today. What do you like and dislike?)
2. What do you think are the biggest problems facing the schools in our community?
3. What do you think are our greatest strengths, both inside and outside the schools, for dealing with those problems?
4. What kinds of ties do our schools have with us? How do our schools work with parents, churches, civic groups, police, business, and the media?

Part 4: What Do We Want Our Graduates to Know and Be Able to Do?

(30 minutes)

Before we talk about how we can help every student succeed, let's think about why we send our children to school. What do we want our young people to know and be able to do when they graduate?

Using the Views

These viewpoints are here just to help us get started. Each view is written in the voice of a person who thinks it is a very important idea. *Some viewpoints that are important to you might not be on this list. Feel free to add other views.*

- First, someone will read each of the viewpoints out loud. (The facilitator or a volunteer can do this.)
- Then, we will use the following questions to help us talk.
  1. What other viewpoints would you add? What is missing?
  2. Which viewpoints come closest to your own? Why?
  3. How have your life and values shaped your views?
  4. What new ideas or ways of thinking are you learning from others in your study circle?

Viewpoints

View #1

According to this view...

Graduates must have basic skills in reading, writing, and math.

- Students need basic skills to be able to learn other things. Also, without these skills, graduates can't succeed in most jobs, or in life. They need to know how to budget money, fill out forms, and more. We should stick to the basics. When we try to teach too much, we don't spend enough time on the most important subjects.

View #2

According to this view...

Graduates must have job skills.

- Our graduates must be prepared for good jobs. We need to teach computer skills and other high-tech skills. Graduates also need "people skills," such as how to work in teams. We need to help students become dependable and able to adapt to change. Students should have the chance to get on-the-job training, with skilled workers to teach them. Students will work harder in school when they know that doing well will help them get a good job.

View #3

According to this view...

Graduates must be responsible people.

- Being responsible means being able to show up and get the job done. It takes more than just skills to succeed in real life. Young people need to learn basic values, such as honesty, respect, and service to others. If we don't teach these values, graduates won't have the moral strength to be good family members, workers, and citizens.

View #4

According to this view...

Graduates must have skills for everyday life.

- Young people need certain skills and information just to survive. They need to know how to make a budget and how to pay bills. Young adults need to learn how to relate well to others in the workplace and at home. They need to learn how to settle disputes. We need to teach them about hard issues like parenting, sex-related diseases, drugs, and alcohol.

View #5

According to this view...

Graduates must be ready to learn for a lifetime.

- The best thing we can do is to teach students how to keep on learning. They must be able to talk clearly with others, think critically, and find out what they need to know. If they know how to work in teams and solve problems, they will be better prepared for the real world. Today's graduates will probably change jobs many times. We must prepare them for change.

View #6

According to this view...

Graduates must have the skills to be good citizens.

- We are facing real problems in our society. Graduates need to know how to take part in community life. They need the skills to help others in their community. They should learn about democracy, politics and social issues. They should learn how to work in groups, and how to make decisions with other people.

Note to Facilitators ➤

Remember to go back to the list of questions in "Using the Views" on page 7 after you have read these views.

View #7

According to this view...

Graduates must have a well-rounded education.

- We should prepare all students to enter college. That way, they will be ready if they want to go. Graduates should learn not only the basic skills of math, reading and writing, but subjects such as history, art, science, and poetry. All students need to learn about music, drama, and sports to be well-rounded human beings. We need to educate the whole person—mind and body.

Part 5: Conclusion, and Getting Ready for Our Next Session

(10 minutes)

- Where do we agree or disagree?
- Write down any action ideas on the "Action Ideas" sheet so that you can work with them in Session 4.
- In our next session, we will look at the achievement records of the students in our school or school district. To get ready for this, your facilitator will give you some information. We will use this information to help us talk about why some of our students are not succeeding.

Closing: Facilitator Tips

1. Thank people for coming and sharing.
2. Remind everyone that it is very important for them to attend every session.
3. Briefly explain what will be discussed next week. (The Session 2 "Introduction to the Session" will give you this information.)

Session 2

Why Are Some of Our Students Not Succeeding?

MEET EACH OTHER

EXPLORE THE PROBLEM

SET GOALS

PLAN FOR ACTION

Facilitator Tips

- This session has four parts. Use the amount of time suggested for each as a guide.
- Post the notes on the general themes from Session 1 for all to see.
- Have someone list major themes from this session on large sheets of paper so everyone can see them. (See ideas on how to take notes in the "Tips for Facilitators" on page 36.)
- Save the notes so that you can refer to them in later sessions.
- Label a large sheet of paper "Action Ideas." If group members come up with action ideas for helping every student succeed, list them here. (You will use these notes in Session 4.)
- Label another large sheet of paper "Things We Are Already Doing." If group members bring up things that are already being done to help every student succeed, list them here. (You will use these notes in Part 4 of Session 3. You may use them again when you are working on action ideas in Session 4.)
- In Part 2 of this session, use the fact sheets to help study circle members see themes, trends, and the "big picture." Avoid getting bogged down in details.

Introduction to the Session

In Session 1, we talked about how our schools affect us. We asked, "What do we want our graduates to know and be able to do after they leave school?"

In this session, we will talk about why some students are not succeeding in our schools. This will help us develop goals and action ideas in the next sessions.

Part 1: Getting Started

(10 minutes)

- Review the "Introduction to the Session."
- Review the ground rules.
  - Does everyone still agree with the list?
  - Do we need to add anything?
- Since our last meeting, has anything happened that relates to this issue that you would like to share?
- Our facilitator will post the notes from Session 1. He or she will sum up the main ideas from that discussion. This will help us to be ready for our work today.

Part 2: How Are Our Students Doing?

(20 minutes)

At the end of our last session, our facilitator gave us some information on how our students are doing.

- When you look at the information, what stands out? Why?
- Does anything surprise you? Why?
- What overall themes and trends do you see? You may notice that some groups of students seem to be more successful than others.

Part 3: Exploring the Roots of the "Achievement Gap"

(80 minutes)

In Part 2, you may have noticed that some groups of students are doing better than others. The "gap" in success between different groups of students is what some people call the "achievement gap." When we help all of our students succeed, that "gap" will be closed.

Before we can close the achievement gap, we need to think about what causes it. We will probably have many different ideas about this. We may agree with each other on some points, and disagree with each other on other points. That is OK.

Using the Views

These viewpoints are here just to help us get started. Each view is written in the voice of a person who thinks it is a very important idea. ***Some viewpoints that are important to you might not be on this list. Feel free to add other views.***

- First, someone will read each of the viewpoints out loud. (The facilitator or a volunteer can do this.)
- Then, we will use the following questions to help us talk.

1. What other viewpoints would you add? What is missing?
2. Which viewpoints come closest to your own? Why?
3. How have your life and values shaped your views?
4. Do race and culture play a part in the achievement gap? How? Does income level play a part? How?
5. What new ideas or ways of thinking are you learning from others in your study circle?

Facilitator Tip for Part 3

You may need more questions to help deepen the discussion. Here are some suggestions:

1. What do you think is really important to people who hold that opinion?
2. Why would others disagree with your opinion?
3. Think about a view you don't agree with. What might lead someone else to see things that way?
4. For the viewpoints that are close to your own, are there parts of those views that you are not quite sure about?

Viewpoints

View #1

According to this view...

People of color are treated differently than white people. This leads to a gap in student achievement.

Some examples:

- Students of color do not have many role models in school. They do not see enough adult leaders from their own cultures.
- Many school districts that serve students of color do not have enough money.
- Some students don't see their cultures represented in the school curriculum. They can't see how school relates to their own lives. As a result, they lose interest in learning.
- Tests often favor students from European-American cultures. This is not fair to students of other cultures.

View #2

According to this view...

Schools have different goals for different groups of students.

Some examples:

- What adults expect from students makes a difference in how they perform. Students from poor families get labeled as poor students, and often end up in lower-track classes.
- African-American and Latino young people get labeled as poor students, and often end up in lower-track classes.
- Students whose families have come to the United States from other countries are often placed in classes for non-native English speakers. These are usually slower, lower-track classes.
- Some schools set up high-level magnet classes to attract more white students. The problem is that African-American and Latino students may be kept out of these classes.

View #3

According to this view...

The gap in family incomes leads to the achievement gap.

Some examples:

- Poorer families don't get good preschool and day-care programs. When their children start school, they are already "behind" other children.
- Schools in poorer neighborhoods get less money and resources than schools in higher-income neighborhoods. This means that:
  - teacher pay is low, so it is harder to get good teachers;
  - class sizes are too big;
  - buildings are in bad repair;
  - there are fewer books, computers, and supplies.
- Poor families lack access to health care, good food, and summer learning programs. Young people need these things to do well in school.

View #4

According to this view...

Some parents are not involved enough in their children's learning.

Some examples:

- Parents who didn't do well in school might worry that they don't know how to help with schoolwork.
- Some parents don't take responsibility for helping their children in school.
- Some parents don't speak English well, so it is harder for them to help their children with schoolwork.
- Some parents don't limit TV time. This affects how their children perform in school.
- Some parents work long hours or more than one job. This leaves little time to help with schoolwork.

View #5

According to this view...

There are some things that keep parents and schools from working together.

Some examples:

- Some parents don't feel welcome at school events or at meetings of Parent-Teacher Organizations (PTO).
- Parent-teacher meetings may be held during work hours, making it too hard for some parents to come.
- Some parents may not understand how schools work. This makes them nervous about coming to the schools.
- Some parents can't speak English well. Many teachers speak only English.

View #6

According to this view...

Schools spend so much time and energy dealing with big social problems that they can't focus on teaching.

Some examples:

- Some young people come to school hungry and feeling upset. They can't learn very well like this.
- Many young people don't learn about sex, drugs, and other social issues at home. The schools have to take time away from regular subjects to teach about these things.
- Some students come from families where no one is home to help with studying.
- Some students have to walk through dangerous streets to get to school.

View #7

According to this view...

Some students do not have the support they need to make it through the school system.

Some examples:

- Guidance counselors have too many students. They don't have enough time to help each one.
- Some parents either cannot, or do not help.
- Some students simply do not have anyone to stand up for them.
- Some students have medical or emotional needs. There are few counselors or specialists to help them succeed in classes.

Note to Facilitators ➤

Remember to go back to the list of questions in "Using the Views" on page 11 after you have read these views.

Part 4: Conclusion, and Getting Ready for Our Next Session

(10 minutes)

- Where do we agree or disagree?
- What new insights did you get today?
- Write down action ideas on the "Action Ideas" sheet so that you can talk about them in Session 4.
- In our next session, we will start to build a better future for our young people. We will do this by creating a picture of a community where all students can do their best. Before the next session, you might ask other community members what they think. What goals do they have for our students? For ideas about some goals, look at the examples in Session 3, Part 3. You might also start thinking about these three questions:
  - What is already being done to help our students?
  - What new ideas are people talking about?
  - What are other schools doing that might work here?

Closing: Facilitator Tips

1. Thank people for coming and sharing.
2. Remind everyone that it is very important to attend every session.
3. Briefly explain what will be discussed next week. (The Session 3 "Introduction to the Session" will give you this information.)

Session 3 Picture a Community Where All Students Can Do Their Best...

Facilitator Tips

- This session has five parts. Use the amount of time suggested for each as a guide.
- Post the notes on the themes from Sessions 1 and 2 for all to see.
- Have someone list major themes from this session on large sheets of paper so everyone can see them. (See ideas on how to take notes in the "Tips for Facilitators" on page 36.)
- Save the notes so that you can refer to them in Session 4.
- Label a large sheet of paper "Action Ideas." If group members come up with action ideas for helping every student succeed, list them here. (You will use these notes in Session 4.)
- Label another large sheet of paper "Things We Are Already Doing." If group members bring up things that are already being done to help every student succeed, list them here. (You will use these notes in Part 4 of this session. You might use them again when you are working on action ideas in Session 4.)

Introduction to the Session

The last time we met, we talked about why there is an achievement gap. Our job today is to create a picture of a community where all our students can succeed. If we are going to help all of our students do their best, what should our schools and our community look like?

Today we will create a vision. The next time we meet, we will talk about specific action ideas for bringing that vision to life.

Part 1: Getting Started

(10 minutes)

- Review the "Introduction to the Session".
- Review the ground rules.
  - Does everyone still agree with the list?
  - Do we need to add anything?
- Since our last meeting, has anything happened that relates to this issue that you would like to share?
- Our facilitator will post the notes from Sessions 1 and 2. He or she will remind us of the topic of each session, and sum up the main ideas from those discussions. This will help us shape our vision in our work today.

Part 2: Signs of Hope in Our School

(10 minutes)

These questions will help us get started:

- What signs of hope do you see in our schools?
- What strengths can our community build on?

Part 3: Picture a Community Where All Students Can Do Their Best...

(60 minutes)

We want our schools and our community to help all of our students do their best. Let's picture what that would look like. This will prepare us for Session 4, when we will choose specific action steps that will help us to make these visions happen.

We will build our vision for the future from the ideas we shared in Session 1 about what we want our graduates to know. We will also work from the ideas we shared in Session 2 about why some of our students are not succeeding right now. As we talk today, we can look back at our notes from those sessions. We might want to pay special attention to the places where we agreed, and where we disagreed with each other.

Using the Sample Descriptions

We will use the following descriptions to help us think about a community where all students can succeed. Talking about these ideas will help us think about what we want. ***Some ideas that are important to you might not be on this list. Feel free to add new ideas.***

- First, someone will read each of the descriptions out loud. (The facilitator or a volunteer can do this.)
- Then, we will use the following questions to help us talk.

1. What other ideas would you add? What is missing?
2. Which ideas seem most important to you? Why?
   - How would your favorite ideas help students succeed?
   - What effect would these ideas have on you or your family?
   - What parts would be easy to do?
   - What parts would be harder to do?
3. Think about an idea that is not so important to you. Why would someone else think this is important?
4. What new ideas or ways of thinking are you learning from others in your study circle?

Sample Descriptions:

Pictures of a Community Where All Students Can Succeed

1. ***In a community where all students can succeed,* all students get the resources and services they need.**

The key to student success is to have basic resources and services for all. We must make sure that all students and their families get what they need from the schools. Communities must also provide social services for students and their families. Sometimes we may have to create new resources. Other times, we may need to help people find resources that already exist.

For example,
Students succeed in communities where...

- social services meet family needs.
- schools have tutors and staff who speak Spanish and other languages.
- there are good pre-school programs.
- there are good after-school programs.
- there are enough school counselors and student advocates.
- states give more money and resources to poorer schools.

2. ***In a community where all students can succeed,* schools welcome and support young people of all cultures, income levels, and races.**

Teachers and staff should be as diverse as the community. We must make sure that all teachers get the training they need to work better with students from all cultures.

For example,
Students succeed in communities where...

- we have equal expectations and hopes for every student.
- every student has an equal chance to succeed.
- tests are fair to students of all cultures.
- the curriculum is as diverse as our country.
- teachers teach in ways that work for students from all cultures.
- teachers and school staff are as diverse as our community.

Facilitator Tip

If people bring up specific action ideas, thank them and list those ideas on your "Action Ideas" sheet. Don't spend time on action ideas now. You will do that in Session 4.

3. *In a community where all students can succeed,* schools and the community work well together.

It is important to all of us that our schools and our students do well. To close the gap, we will all need to work together. This means using all of our ideas and resources to make sure that schools work for everyone.

For example,
Students succeed in communities where...

- local businesses offer on-the-job-training.
- schools are learning centers for the whole community.
- many people in the community come to school events.
- parents and students from all cultures feel "at home" in the schools.
- parents, students, teachers and others keep talking with each other and working together to help every student succeed.

4. *In a community where all students can succeed,* schools take responsibility for helping all students achieve.

All of us can help, but the most important thing is how schools help students. We need to be sure that schools have high standards for all students. We also need to be sure that our schools meet those standards.

For example,
Students succeed in communities where...

- schools set clear standards for all students.
- schools are expected to meet these standards.
- teachers and staff have the training they need to meet the standards.
- teachers and staff are tested to be sure they are doing a good job.
- teachers and staff have the help they need to do well.
- schools focus on teaching "the basics" so standards can be met.

Note to Facilitators ▸

Remember to go back to the list of questions in "Using the Sample Descriptions" on page 16 after you have read these views.

Part 5: Conclusion, and Getting Ready for Our Next Session

(10 minutes)

Consider these questions:

- Where do we agree and disagree?
- What new insights did you get today?

Also:

- List any action ideas on the "Action Ideas" sheet so that you can work with them in Session 4.
- In our next session, we will talk about specific action ideas to help close the achievement gap. Before then, you might talk with other community members about this. What do they think we should do to help all our students succeed? For some ideas, look at the sample action ideas in Session 4.

Closing: Facilitator Tips

1. Thank people for coming and sharing.
2. Remind everyone that it is very important to attend the last session.
3. Briefly explain what will be discussed next week. (The Session 4 "Introduction to the Session" will give you this information.)

5. *In a community where all students can succeed,* education involves the whole family.

When families get involved, students do better in school. We need to welcome all parents into the schools. We also need to provide them with tools to help them support their children as they learn.

For example,
Students succeed in communities where...

- schools are open at night so that parents and students can get help doing homework together.
- there are English language classes for students and parents.
- parent-teacher meetings are held at times and in places that will work for parents.
- there are parenting classes and parent support groups.
- schools are "learning centers" for the whole family. They are open at night and on weekends for special programs.

Part 4: What Is Already Being Done?

(30 minutes)

Let's talk about what our schools and our community are already doing to help every student succeed. To help us get started:

- we can look at our list called "Things We Are Already Doing."
- our facilitator might give us some information about what is already being done.

(This conversation will help us prepare for our next session, when we will talk about specific actions that we could take to close the achievement gap.)

Discuss these questions:

- Do we know what other schools or communities are doing to help every student succeed? If so,
  - what is being done?
  - how is it working?
  - how could it be even better?

Making a Difference: What Specific Actions Do We Want to Take?

Facilitator Tips

- This session has six parts. Use the amount of time suggested for each as a guide.
- Post notes on the general themes from Sessions 1, 2, and 3 for all to see.
- Also post your sheets labeled "Action Ideas" and "Things we are Already Doing."
- Today, your circle will make a short list of action ideas to present at the action forum. Some ideas that individuals feel strongly about may not end up on that list. Tell people that they will have a chance to add their own ideas at the action forum.

For experienced facilitators...

- Adapt the instructions for selecting and setting priorities (Parts 2 and 3 of this session) to suit your needs. Do what works best for your group. Use the numbers provided as a guide only.

Introduction to the Session

In Session 3, we created a picture of a community where all our students can succeed. Now let's talk about specific action ideas for bringing that vision to life. We also need to decide which of those ideas are most important. We can divide these actions into four types: things that...

- our community can do.
- our schools can do.
- we can do on our own.
- we can do together.

Later, at the action forum, we will present these ideas, and hear from other study circles. (For a little more information about the action forum, see page 37.)

Part 1: Getting Started

(10 minutes)

- Review the "Introduction to the Session."
- Review the ground rules.
- Since our last meeting, has anything happened that relates to this issue that you would like to share?
- Our facilitator will post the notes from Sessions 1, 2, and 3. He or she will remind us of the topic of each session, and sum up the main ideas from those discussions. This will help us make good decisions about action steps to help close the achievement gap.

Part 2: Thinking about Ways to Make a Difference

(15 minutes)

In Session 3 we talked about our visions for our community. What can we do to bring those visions to life? Let's talk about ideas that could make that happen.

1. Our facilitator will post the "Action Ideas" sheet from the first three sessions.
2. We will break into groups of two or three people. In your group, spend a few minutes talking over the ideas on this list. Also, look at the action ideas on the following pages. These ideas will help each of us to think about what we believe is most important.
3. Think about action ideas that you believe would work for your community. You might talk about ideas from the lists, or you might invent new ideas.
4. Use these questions to help guide your discussion:
   - Of the many ideas raised in our study circle, which ones seem best? Why?
   - How would doing these things bring our visions from Session 3 to life?
   - What ideas from other places could we use? How could they help?
   - How could we build on what is already being done to close the achievement gap?
   - Who else should be involved?

Action Ideas

Below are some action ideas. Use these ideas to spark your own thinking.

What can parents and other community members do to help all students succeed?

- Motivate our young people to succeed in school.
- Get to know how schools work. Learn about school standards, goals, and testing. Find out what, when, and how things get done in schools.
- Find out about tutors, counselors, and other kinds of student support at school.
- Join the Parent-Teacher Organization. Welcome new parents of all cultures and groups. Give them a hand.
- Meet other parents in your child's classroom. Talk about common concerns and ideas.
- Attend all teacher/parent meetings. Stay in touch with teachers all year long.
- Meet as often as you can with teachers and staff. Ask how your child is doing and what she or he is learning. Offer to help.

What can students do to help themselves and other students?

- Become a mentor or tutor for someone who needs help.
- Talk with your parents about how school is going. Ask for their help.
- Make friends with students of other cultures or groups. Ask them what they think about things.
- Encourage your classmates to set high goals and do their best.
- Talk to your teachers about what affects you. Tell them what works and what does not. You may want to talk to your parents about this, also.

What can our whole community do to help all students succeed?

- Start or improve after-school learning centers. Offer support services, such as tutors and computers.
- Urge employers to give working parents free time to go to school meetings.
- Urge employers to give workers free time to tutor and mentor students.
- Start on-the-job training programs.
- Offer high-quality, low-cost child care.
- Ask churches, faith groups, or community centers to offer good tutoring programs for young people.
- Offer peer-mentoring programs for parents. (Parents helping parents.)
- Offer peer-mentoring program for students. (Students helping students.)
- Expand or improve Head Start or pre-K programs for preschoolers.
- Give tours to show families what school is like before their children start school.

What can our schools do to help all students succeed?

- Train staff and teachers in cultural diversity. Show them how important it is to treat all students fairly and equally.
- Test and observe teachers to see if they are doing a good job. They may need coaching and mentoring.
- Provide more bilingual information and outreach.
- Encourage good teachers to teach at-risk students.
- Get involved with organizations that support student achievement, like the Minority Student Achievement Network.
- All students need role models. Make sure that teachers and other school staff are as diverse as the student body.
- Make it easy for parents to get information about student learning, community resources, school policies, etc. This could be done by offering a parents' class.
- Help parents and students understand school policies that affect testing, curriculum, and what keeps students in school. Offer training about school systems and how they work. Explain what schools expect and how state standards work.

What can our schools and the community do together to help all students succeed?

- Continue the study circles. Find ways for everyone–parents, students, and school staff-to keep talking about how to help all young people do well in school.
- When young people do well, give them rewards and praise them. For students who are at risk, this is very important.
- Offer rewards to good students, like tickets to special events, awards, college scholarships, etc.
- Inform the community about the resources schools offer for students and families.
- Begin a "Partners In Education" program that links businesses with schools.
- Hold parent/teacher meetings after hours for working parents. Offer parents support in the way of child care, rides, and translators.
- Set up a "phone tree" for parents to call parents when special events or classes are being offered.
- When students have been suspended, give them ways to keep up with their schoolwork.
- Invite community "experts" to help judge student contests and art shows.
- Reward and honor teachers who improve student achievement.
- Start support teams for each subject area. Teachers, tutors, and parents could "team up" and offer extra help in subjects like English, math, or history.
- Invite speakers to talk to teachers and the community about ways of teaching that have worked and inspired others.
- Urge parents to join their Parent-Teacher Organization and attend all parent/ teacher meetings.
- Offer adult classes in parenting and English as a Second Language (ESL).
- Offer classes to parents so they can help their children with their schoolwork.

Sort your action ideas into four categories:

Community Actions

School Actions

Actions On Your Own

Community and Schools Together

Part 3: Brainstorming Action Ideas

(25 minutes)

In this part you will "brainstorm" action ideas. Your facilitator will help you sort your ideas into four categories:

1. Community actions
2. School actions
3. Actions people can do on their own
4. Actions that the community and the schools can take together

Brainstorming...

is a way for our group to come up with lots of ideas.

Purpose:

To help us be creative.

To come up with many different ideas in a short time.

Guidelines:

All ideas are OK.

Don't stop to talk about ideas.

Don't judge ideas.

Build on other's ideas.

How to do it:

Anyone can offer an idea. You don't need to wait for your "turn."

The facilitator will write down every idea.

Write down ideas in the speaker's words.

Instructions for Brainstorming:

1. If you are still sitting in your small group from Part 2, come back and join the circle.
2. Next, take a few quiet moments to think. In your small group, you talked about some action ideas. Which ideas were most important to you?
3. While you are doing this, your facilitator will put a sheet of paper for each category on the wall. (See example at left.)
4. Now, we will do a "brainstorm." Share your action ideas with the group. Your facilitator will write down your ideas on the appropriate sheet.

Part 4: Setting Priorities for the Action Forum

(50 minutes)

From the lists we made in our brainstorm, we will now choose three or four action ideas that we think could make the most difference in our community. We will take these ideas to the action forum. *Look at the "Action Idea Sheet" on page 28. This is how your results will look when you are finished.*

Instructions for setting priorities

1. Start by looking at the action ideas on the "Community Actions" sheet. If some of the ideas are nearly alike, combine them. Now do the same thing for each of the other sheets.
2. The next step is to narrow down our lists. We will select a total of no more than eight of our favorite action ideas. (We will pick the ideas that we think are most important. It does not matter if all our ideas come from the same list, from two or three lists, or from all of the lists.)

   To narrow down the lists:

   a. Each person will get three votes. Our facilitator will give each of us three colored stickers (or something similar) for this.

   b. Each of us will vote for the ideas we like best. We can use all three votes on one idea, or we can spread them around.

   c. Look at the ideas that have the most votes. There will probably be about eight.

3. Next, we will narrow down our lists again. Look at the eight ideas that you picked in Step 2. Which three or four of these seem most practical, useful, timely, and important?

   To help us talk about this, we will use the following questions:

   - What are the pros and cons of each idea?
   - What would it take to make these ideas become real? What help or support would we need?
   - What resources are already in place to help out? What are we already good at doing?

4. If you now have only three or four ideas left, you are finished! You are ready to go to the action forum. (Skip step 5 and go on to step 6.)
5. If you still have more than four ideas, vote again. (Use the same procedure as in Steps 2a and 2b.) After the vote, select the three or four ideas that get the most votes. These are the ideas you will take to the action forum. You are finished!
6. Make sure that you write your final three or four ideas down on a sheet of paper. You can use the "Action Idea Sheet" on page 28 for this.

A Tip For Experienced Facilitators

In Part 4, the instructions give you a specific number of ideas to select at each step in the priority-setting process. Use these numbers as a guide only. Do what makes the most sense for your group and your study circle program.

Sample Action Idea Sheet to Take to Action Forum

Action ideas from

_____

(Study Circle Name or Number)

Our group's top three or four action ideas:

Idea #1_____

_____

Category *(select one)*

- ❑ Community actions
- ❑ School actions
- ❑ Actions on your own
- ❑ Actions that the community and the schools can take together

Idea #2_____

_____

Category *(select one)*

- ❑ Community actions
- ❑ School actions
- ❑ Actions on your own
- ❑ Actions that the community and the schools can take together

Idea #3_____

_____

Category *(select one)*

- ❑ Community actions
- ❑ School actions
- ❑ Actions on your own
- ❑ Actions that the community and the schools can take together

Idea #4_____

_____

Category *(select one)*

- ❑ Community actions
- ❑ School actions
- ❑ Actions on your own
- ❑ Actions that the community and the schools can take together

Part 5: Preparing for the Action Forum

(10 minutes)

1. Your facilitator will tell you the date, time, and place of the action forum.
2. Choose a person from your group to present your action ideas at the forum.

Part 6: Conclusion: Reflect on Our Study Circle Experience

(10 minutes)

Questions to think about

1. What have you learned so far? What has made the biggest impact on how you think and act?
2. What do you most value about your study circle?

Closing: Facilitator Tips

1. Thank people for coming to the study circle, and for working to make a difference in their community.
2. Ask if anyone has questions about the action forum.

Tips for Study Circle Participants

Our goal in a study circle is to understand the issue better. We don't have to learn a lot of new facts and figures. We also don't have to agree with each other. We will look at different viewpoints, and we will talk to one another as equals. How we talk to one another is as important as what we say.

The following tips will help you and your study circle succeed.

Listen carefully to others. Make sure you are giving everyone a chance to speak. Don't interrupt people. When you show respect for other people, it helps them show respect for you.

Keep an open mind. This is a chance for you to explore ideas that you have rejected or didn't consider in the past.

Do your best to understand other points of view. It is important to understand what other people think and why they feel the way they do. This will help you find solutions that work for everyone.

Help keep the discussion on track. Make sure your remarks relate to the discussion.

Speak your mind freely, but don't take over the discussion. If you tend to talk a lot in groups, leave room for quieter people. Being a good listener shows respect for others. This makes it easier for quiet people to speak up.

Talk to the group rather than the leader. Try to look around the group when you talk. That will help others to know that they are part of the conversation.

Talk to individuals in the group. A study circle should feel like a conversation. Try to involve everyone. If you feel someone has something to say, draw them out. Ask them questions about their ideas.

Tell the leader what you need. The leader guides the discussion, sums up key ideas, and helps to make things clear. If something is not clear, ask the leader about this. Others might have the same concern.

Value your life stories and opinions. Everyone in the group, including you, is special. No one is the same. All our lives have been different. This is what makes the study circle interesting. Make sure your voice is heard. Your wisdom and ideas are important.

It's OK to disagree. Even when we all come from the same group or culture, we are still different. These differences keep the group lively. If you do not agree with an idea, ask questions. But don't get carried away. Be respectful.

Remember that humor and a pleasant manner will help. When you keep your sense of humor, people will like listening to you. You can disagree with someone without making a personal attack. When you talk, your body "talks," too. Pay attention to your "body language."

A Comparison of Dialogue and Debate

Dialogue is collaborative: Two or more sides work together toward common understanding.	Debate is oppositional: Two sides oppose each other and attempt to prove each other wrong.
In dialogue, finding common ground is the goal.	In debate, winning is the goal.
In dialogue, one listens to the other side(s) in order to understand, find meaning, and find agreement.	In debate, one listens to the other side in order to find flaws and to counter its arguments.
Dialogue enlarges and possibly changes a participant's point of view.	Debate affirms a participant's own point of view.
Dialogue reveals assumptions for re-evaluation.	Debate defends assumptions as truth.
Dialogue causes introspection on one's own position.	Debate causes critique of the other position.
Dialogue opens the possibility of reaching a better solution than any of the original solutions.	Debate defends one's own positions as the best solution and excludes other solutions.
Dialogue creates an open-minded attitude: an openness to being wrong and an openness to change.	Debate creates a close-minded attitude, a determination to be right.
In dialogue, one submits one's best thinking, knowing that other people's reflections will help improve it rather than destroy it.	In debate, one submits one's best thinking and defends it against challenge to show that it is right.
Dialogue calls for temporarily suspending one's beliefs.	Debate calls for investing wholeheartedly in one's beliefs.
In dialogue, one searches for basic agreements.	In debate, one searches for glaring differences.
In dialogue, one searches for strengths in the other positions.	In debate, one searches for flaws and weaknesses in the other position.
Dialogue involves a real concern for the other person and seeks to not alienate or offend.	Debate involves a countering of the other position without focusing on feelings or relationships and often belittles or deprecates the other person.
Dialogue assumes that many people have pieces of the answer and that together they can put them into a workable solution.	Debate assumes that there is a right answer and that someone has it.
Dialogue remains open-ended.	Debate implies a conclusion.

Adapted from a paper prepared by Shelley Berman, which was based on discussions of the Dialogue Group of the Boston Chapter of Educators for Social Responsibility (ESR). Other members included Lucile Burt, Dick Mayo-Smith, Lally Stowell, and Gene Thompson. For more information on ESR's programs and resources using dialogue as a tool for dealing with controversial issues, call the national ESR office at (800) 370-2515.

Tips for Study Circle Facilitators

As a study circle facilitator, you do not need to be an expert on the topic being discussed. The important thing is to be well prepared for the discussion. This means you will need to...

- understand the goals of the study circle;
- be familiar with the discussion materials;
- think ahead of time about how the discussion might go;
- prepare questions to help the group think more deeply about the subject.

In some sessions, you might find that there is more to talk about than you can cover in two hours. Choose what that you think will be most interesting to your group. (Your group might want to consider having extra meetings.)

Do your best to prepare ahead of time. This will make it easier for you to give your full attention to helping the circle accomplish its goals. Stay neutral!

It is most important to remember that, as a facilitator, you should not share your personal views or try to push your own agenda on the issue. You are there to serve the discussion, not to join it.

Set a relaxed and open tone.

- Welcome everyone and create a friendly and relaxed space.
- People enjoy well-placed humor.

Explain the purpose of the study circle, and help the group set ground rules.

At the beginning of the study circle, remind everyone that the purpose of the study circle is to work with one another to look at the issue in a democratic way. Remind them that your role as leader is not to be an "expert." Also, make it clear that you will not take sides in the discussion. Your job is to keep the discussion focused and make sure the group follows the ground rules.

Suggest the basic ground rules listed in Session 1, Part 2, then ask people to add their own ideas. Stay aware of, and assist the group process.

- Besides keeping the group focused on the content of the discussion, you will keep track of how people are communicating. Some people talk a lot. Others tend to be quiet. Be aware of this, and make sure everyone has a chance to speak.
- Consider splitting up into smaller groups to look at different viewpoints. This gives people a chance to talk more easily about their personal connection to the issue.
- Try not to interfere with the discussion unless you have to. Don't allow the group to turn to you for the answers.
- Resist the urge to speak after each comment or answer every question. Let people respond directly to each other. The most effective leaders often say little, but are constantly thinking about how to move the discussion forward.

- Once in a while, ask participants to sum up the most important points that have come out in the discussion.
- Don't be afraid of silence! People sometimes need time to think before they respond. If silence is hard for you, try counting silently to ten before you rephrase the question. This will give people time to collect their thoughts.
- Don't let anyone take over the discussion. Try to involve everyone.
- Remember that a study circle is not a debate, but a group dialogue. If the group forgets this, remind them of the ground rules.
- Keep careful track of time!

Help the group look at various points of view.

- Make it clear to people that you will never take sides on the issue. Your role as a facilitator is to be fair, and to keep the group focused on their own thinking.
- Use these written materials to help everyone consider a wide range of views. Rely on the guide rather than presenting something as your idea. Referring to the guide helps you stay neutral. You might ask the group to consider a point of view that hasn't come up in the discussion. Ask the group to think about the pros and cons of different ways of looking at an issue or solving a problem.
- Ask people to think about the concerns and values that underlie their beliefs.
- Don't allow the group to focus on just one point, or one person's story.
- Help people find common ground. But, don't try to force agreement.

Ask open-ended questions that don't lend themselves to easy answers.

Open-ended questions are questions that can't be answered with a quick "yes" or "no." They push people to think about why they believe what they do. Open-ended questions also encourage people to look for connections between different ideas.

Examples:

- What seems to be the key point here?
- Do you agree with that? Why?
- What do other people think of this idea?
- What would be a strong case against what you just said?
- Have you had any experiences with this that you can share with the group?
- Could you help us understand the reasons behind your opinion?
- What do you think is really going on here? Why is that important?
- How might others see this issue?
- Do you think others in the group see this the way you do? Why? Why not?
- How does this make you feel?

Questions to use when people disagree:

- What do you think she or he is saying?
- What bothers you most about this?
- What is at the heart of the disagreement?
- How does this make you feel?
- What might lead a reasonable person to support that point of view?
- What do you think is really important to people who hold that opinion?
- What is blocking the discussion?
- What might you be willing to give up in order to come to some agreement?
- What don't you agree with?
- What do you find most convincing about that point of view?
- What is it about that position that doesn't work for you?
- Could you say more about what you think?
- What have we missed that we need to talk about?

Questions to use when people are feeling discouraged:

- Say a little about how that makes you feel.
- Where can you find some hope?
- Can the problems that you are talking about be solved in any way? How?

Closing questions:

- Where did we agree and disagree today?
- What have you heard today that has made you think, or that has touched you in some way?

Be aware of how people from different cultures communicate.

- When issues of race and culture are a part of the conversation, be ready to address the kinds of things that might come up.
- Even though some of the conversation may revolve around differences, set a tone of unity in the group. Yes, there are differences–but we have enough in common as human beings to allow us to talk together in a constructive way.
- Having two facilitators is often helpful. This sets an example of unity. The co-facilitators could be a man and a woman, a white person and a person of color, an adult and a young person, a manager and a worker. (If some facilitators are newly trained, team the new people with people who have experience with cross-cultural issues in study circles.)
- Sensitivity, empathy, and familiarity with people of different backgrounds are important qualities for the facilitator. If you have not spent much time with people from other cultures, get involved in a local community program that helps you do this.

- Help people to appreciate and respect their own and others' communication styles. How people were raised affects how they communicate. For example, in some cultures, people are raised to take charge and say exactly what they think. In other cultures, people are expected to be more reserved and keep their thoughts to themselves. Some cultures value listening more than speaking. In others, taking a stand is very important. Point out to the group that there is more than one good way to communicate. Understanding one another takes practice! Your leadership should show that each person has an important contribution to make to the group.
- Talk about how cultural labels, or stereotypes, are unfair.
- Remind the group, if necessary, that no one can speak for his or her entire culture. Each person's experiences, as an individual and as a member of a group, are different.
- Urge group members to talk about themselves and their own cultures, rather than other people's. This way, they will be less likely to make false generalizations about other cultures. Also, listening to others tell their stories will help break down stereotypes and build understanding.

Note-taking Tips

Note taking serves many purposes:

- It helps group members stay on track and move the discussion along.
- It provides a way to capture the wisdom and common themes that develop in the discussion.
- Notes from all the circles in your program can be turned into a report that summarizes what you have done.

How to do it:

- Capture big ideas and themes, not every word.
- Use the words of the speaker as closely as possible.
- Check with the group to make sure your notes are correct.
- Some groups organize their records this way:
  - Areas where we agree
  - Areas where we disagree
  - Areas that are mixed
- Write neatly so everyone can read the notes.
- People should be talking to each other, not to the note taker.

Moving from Dialogue to Action

The Action Forum

Study circles lead to action and change in many ways. One of the ways in which you will work toward action and change is through an action forum. See the outline of a typical action forum in the grey box, below.

An action forum is a large-group meeting at the end of a round of study circles. At this meeting, ideas from all the study circles are presented. In most cases, there will be several action ideas that many people support.

Action groups or task forces form to move these ideas forward. Participants have the chance to work in these action groups, or to stay involved in other ways. In programs that continue over time, more and more people get involved in further rounds of study circles, and many kinds of action occur.

The action forum is not the only way action and change happen through study circle programs. The table on the next page shows many of the ways that action and change take place.

Typical Parts of an Action Forum (1½ to 3 hours)

1. **Refreshments, social time, entertainment, gallery walk (time to read summaries from each circle posted around the room)**
2. **Welcome and introductions**
   - Welcome everyone, and introduce sponsoring organizations
   - Review agenda
   - Talk about the study circle effort in the community
   - Recognize and thank facilitators and other key volunteers
3. **Reports from the study circles**
   - A representative from each circle speaks for a few minutes, summarizing key issues or concerns, plus major ideas for action
4. **Moving to action**
   - Master of ceremonies summarizes the most common themes for action from all circles, and invites participants to sign up for an action group or task force
   - Participants choose action group or task force, and sign up
   - Leader for each action group collects names, and sets the first meeting
   - Interested people sign up for facilitator training, or to help organize future study circles
5. **Closing remarks**
   - Closing remarks (including how the action efforts will be tracked and tied to further organizing)
   - Next steps (including plans for another round of circles, celebration, or check-in meeting)
   - Thanks to all

How Study Circles Lead to Action and Change

The table below shows some of the kinds of change that can happen from study circle programs.

Kind of change	How does it happen?	Example
Changes in individual behavior and attitudes	Better understanding of the issues and of one another inspires people to "make a difference."	A participant in a community-wide program on racism decides never again to let racist remarks go by without a comment.
New relationships and networks	Trust and understanding develop between participants in the dialogue.	Following study circles on community-police relationships, young people and police officers hold weekly meetings.
New working collaborations	Individuals and organizations develop new relationships and new ideas for solutions.	After study circles on neighborhood issues, residents, police officers, and mental heath advocates create an emergency team to help mentally ill people who wander the streets.
Institutional changes	Leaders and/or members of an institution gain new insights in study circles that lead to changes within the institution and in the larger community.	After doing study circles on race, leaders of several banks work with others to improve banking services to communities of color.
Changes in public policy	Public officials help organize study circles, and pledge to work with citizens to implement action ideas. *OR* Public officials take part in the organizing and dialogue, and gain new insights that have an impact on their policymaking. *OR* Information from the study circles is collected and reported to decision makers.	Following study circles on education, participants develop a plan to close the gap in achievement between the races. The school board – a leading organizer of the circles – funds the plan and helps carry it out. After participating in study circles, a school superintendent creates new policies to involve parents in the district's schools. A report from study circles on growth and sprawl is turned over to the planning board, which uses this information to help shape the town's strategic plan.
Changes in community dynamics	Many hundreds of people take part in study circles. Once there is a "critical mass" of people who have a new understanding of the issues and of one another, their capacity for community work increases.	Study circles on race relations happen in a community over years. In all kinds of settings, public meetings begin to operate according to study circle principles. People learn to work together across differences, and feel a stronger sense of community.
Changes in a community's public life	Once people see the benefits of larger-scale dialogue to action, they make it an ongoing part of how their community works.	After a round of study circles on education, the school district decides to use study circles routinely to involve citizens in creating and implementing it's annual school-improvement plan.

Resources for Further Discussion and Action

For More Information On...

- closing the achievement gap-stories from other communities, please go to the SCRC web site at www.studycircles.org.
- how to...
  - plan and conduct your action forum,
  - organize community-wide study circles,
  - train facilitators,

  please see the organizing and training guides listed on this page.
- study circles in general, please go to the SCRC web site at www.studycircles.org.

Publications from the Study Circles Resource Center

Organizing and Training Guides

A Guide for Training Study Circle Facilitators, 1998. Presents a step-by-step agenda for a basic study circle training program, as well as information on building and supporting an ongoing training program, including recruitment, skill building, training young people as facilitators, and other related information. Training and evaluation materials are also included.

Organizing Community-wide Dialogue for Action and Change: A Step-by-Step Guide, 2001. This guide is designed to help you understand and carry out the many aspects of community-wide organizing for public dialogue and action.

Discussion Guides

Building Strong Neighborhoods: A Study Circle Guide for Public Dialogue and Community Problem Solving, 1998. A four-session discussion guide on many important neighborhood issues including: race and other kinds of differences; young people and families; safety and community-police relations; homes, housing and beautification; jobs and neighborhood economy; and schools.

Building Strong Neighborhoods for Families with Children: A Guide for Public Dialogue and Problem Solving, 2000. A four-session discussion guide to help people make their neighborhoods better places for families with children by identifying challenges and opportunities, and working toward solutions.

Changing Faces, Changing Communities: Immigration & Race, Jobs, Schools, and Language Differences, 2nd Edition, 1998. A discussion guide designed to help communities face the challenges and meet the opportunities that come with immigration. In addition to six discussion sessions, this guide also provides pointers on how to involve public officials in study circles.

Education: How Can Schools and Communities Work Together to Meet the Challenge?: A Guide for Involving Community Members in Public Dialogue and Problem Solving, 1995. A multi-session discussion guide which examines the challenges schools face, and the ways in which community members and educators can work together to improve education.

Facing the Challenge of Racism and Race Relations: Democratic Dialogue and Action for Stronger Communities, 3rd Edition, 1997. Built on the success of two previous editions, this guide offers five sessions that discuss history, institutional racism, economic opportunity, public policy, and strategies for change. It also provides tips for organizing community-wide study circle programs, with action examples from around the country.

Protecting Communities, Serving the Public: Police and residents building relationships to work together, 2000. A five-session discussion guide to help communities improve working relationships between residents and police departments by building trust and respect, developing better policies, and making changes for safer communities.

Smart Talk for Growing Communities: Meeting the Challenges of Growth and Development, 1998. A five-session discussion guide that helps communities address the effects of development, and find ways to make growth work for them. This guide also provides pointers on how to involve public officials in study circles, and numerous action examples from around the country.

Toward a More Perfect Union in an Age of Diversity: A Guide for Building Stronger Communities through Public Dialogue, 1997. A four-session discussion guide examining ideas about unity, diversity, and pluralism, and how they affect us as individuals, as members of organizations and businesses, as residents of our communities, and as citizens of our country.

Youth Issues, Youth Voices: A Guide for Engaging Youth and Adults in Public Dialogue and Problem Solving, 1996. A multi-session discussion guide geared toward bringing young people and adults together to address the community issues that involve and impact them, from race relations to substance abuse.

These publications are available from:
Study Circles Resource Center
P.O. Box 203
Pomfret, CT 06258
Phone: 860-928-2616
Fax: 860-928-3713
E-mail: scrc@studycircles.org

You may also download many of our publications from our web site at no charge:
www.studycircles.org

Other Resources

ASPIRA Association, Inc.
1444 Eye Street, NW, Suite 800
Washington, DC 20005
202-835-3600
Web site: www.aspira.org
A nonprofit organization devoted solely to the education and leadership development of Latino youth.

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
1703 N. Beauregard Street
Alexandria, VA 22311-1714
703-578-9600
Web site: www.ascd.org
An international, nonprofit, nonpartisan association of professional educators from all grade levels and subject areas. Incorporating diversity and community in education is a priority of this organization.

Center for Law and Education
1875 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 510
Washington, DC 20009
202-986-3000
Web site: www.cleweb.org
Endorses the right of all students to quality education, and assists low-income students and communities in efforts to address public education problems.

Coalition of Essential Schools
1814 Franklin Street, Suite 700
Oakland, CA 94612
510-433-1451
Web site: www.essentialschools.org
A national network of schools, and support centers, and a national office engaged in restructuring schools to promote better student learning and achievement.

Communities in Schools
277 S. Washington Street, Suite 210
Alexandria, VA 22314
703-519-8999
Web site: www.cisnet.org
A community-building organization that delivers resources for children by working in partnership with public schools.

Do Something
423 West 55th Street, 8th Floor
New York, NY 10019
212-523-1175
Web site: www.dosomething.org
Provides nationwide networking, resources, and support for young people who are working to make a difference in their communities.

ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education
Institute for Urban and Minority Education
Box 40, Teachers College, Columbia University
New York, NY 10027
800-601-4868
Web site: http://eric-web.tc.columbia.edu/home_files/eric_cue_desc.html
A database accessible on the Internet and used for educational research. The ERIC UE web site is dedicated to urban students, their families, and the educators who serve them.

Learning Disabilities Association of America
4156 Library Road
Pittsburgh, PA 15234-1349
412-341-1515
Web site: www.ldanatl.org
Nonprofit, volunteer organization of individuals, families, and professionals committed to advancing the education and general welfare of individuals with learning disabilities.

National Alliance of Black School Educators
310 Pennsylvania Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20003
202-608-6310
Web site: www.nabse.org
The nation's largest network of African American educators, NABSE is dedicated to improving the educational accomplishments of African American youth through the development and deployment of instructional and motivational methods that increase levels of inspiration, attendance and overall achievement.

National Assessment of Educational Progress
National Assessment Governing Board
800 North Capitol Street, NW, Suite 825
Washington, DC 20002
202-357-6938
Web site: http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/sitemap.asp
Also known as "the Nation's Report Card."
A nationally representative, continuing assessment of what America's students know and can do in various subject areas.

National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education
3929 Old Lee Highway, Suite 91-A
Fairfax, VA 22030-2401
703-359-8973
Web site: www.ncpie.org
Advocates the involvement of parents and families in their children's education, and fosters relationships between home, school, and community to enhance the education of all young people.

National Coalition of Advocates for Students
100 Boylston Street, Suite 737
Boston, MA 02116
617-357-8507
Web site: www.igc.org/ncas
The NCAS maintains the
Clearinghouse for Immigrant Education
Web site: www.igc.apc.org/ncas/chime.htm
Through its 20 member groups, NCAS works to achieve equal access to quality public education for students at risk by informing and mobilizing parents, educators, and communities. To help support the education of immigrant students, NCAS established the Clearinghouse for Immigrant Education (CHIME), which serves as an interactive database and networking service facilitating public access to literature, research, Internet resources, and reform strategies.

National Community Education Association
3929 Old Lee Highway, Suite 91-A
Fairfax, VA 22030-2401
703-359-8973
Web site: www.ncea.com
Advocates for community education by promoting parent and community involvement in public education, formation of community partnerships, and lifelong learning for the entire community.

National Dropout Prevention Center/Network
Clemson University
209 Martin Street
Clemson, SC 29631-1555
864-656-2599
Web site: www.dropoutprevention.org
Provides resources on the importance of a quality education, including graduation from high school.

National Education Association
1201 16th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20036
202-833-4000
Web site: www.nea.org
A membership organization made up of employees of schools and other educational groups that is dedicated to advancing public education.

National Parent Teacher Association
330 N. Wabash Avenue, Suite 2100
Chicago, IL 60611
800-307-4782
Web site: www.pta.org
Volunteer child advocacy organization of parents, educators, students, and other citizens active in their schools and communities.

National School Boards Association
1680 Duke Street
Alexandria, VA 22314
703-838-6722
Web site: www.nsba.org
Works with members to foster excellence and equity in public education through school board leadership.

National Urban League
The National Urban League, Inc.
120 Wall Street, New York, NY 10005
212-558-5300
Web site: www.nul.org/index.html
The mission of this movement, one aspect of which focuses on education and youth, is to enable African-Americans to secure economic self-reliance, parity and power, and civil rights. Direct services, advocacy, research, policy analysis, community mobilization, collaboration and communications are carried out at the local, state, and national levels.

Quality Education for Minorities Network
1818 N Street, NW, Suite 350
Washington, DC 20036
202-659-1818
Web site: http://qemnetwork.qem.org
Nonprofit organization dedicated to improving education of African-Americans, Alaska Natives, American Indians, Mexican Americans, and Puerto Ricans. Focuses on: community outreach and leadership development, partnerships with NASA and others, and policymaking.

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The Study Circles Resource Center is solely responsible for any errors in this guide.

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Web site: www.studycircles.org

This guide is a manual for study circle participants, organizers, and facilitators.

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